

ONE FINE WEEKEND



Pacifica has long been a haven for hikers, surfers, paragliders, birders, and history buffs.

The Pleasures of Pacifica

Stimulate your five senses in this six-mile-long oceanfront refuge.

BY GINNY PRIOR

Wild coast, wildlife, wildflowers. Spring is seductive in Pacifica, where hawks “surf” the thermals over a riot of eye-popping blooms. With some 3,600 acres of open space and postcard views of the coast, the best way to experience Pacifica is to engage all your senses.

Seaside daisies, wild mustard, and lupines blanket the cliffs. You may spot a whale in the distant waters. And because Pacifica is one of the Bay Area’s best birding spots, try to identify the “chwirk” sound of a red-tailed hawk.

Your sense of smell comes into play on the Pacifica Municipal Pier, as fishermen haul in their catches of sea bass and crab; taste, from the salt spray that splashes over the seawall at Rockaway Beach. And finally, your sense of touch activates as you feel the cool breeze, often infused with warm sun—what locals call nature’s hot- and cold-stone massage.

Pacifica is a tapestry of several unique beach neighborhoods. Here are the highlights.

MILE ONE

From the moment you round that first tight curve on southbound Highway 1, you are thrust into a dramatic ocean vista. Imagine the old Ocean Shore Railroad making the turn as passengers get their initial glimpse of the sea, framed by a spine of mountains to the east and the imposing Devil’s Slide to the south. **Mussel Rock Park Beach** is nature’s best show here—an ancient outcropping of rocks that calved violently from the headlands; there’s also

a neighboring park that's great for birding. Spend time watching the antics of black scoters, western gulls, pigeon guillemots, and black oystercatchers. Spot a bigger "bird," and it's probably a human paraglider. Some of the best hang gliding in the world is off the bluffs above you.

MILE TWO

The Sharp Park district is packed with attractions, from an enchanted Scottish-style castle to one of the state's top municipal fishing piers. Start with **Sam's Castle**, the turreted fortress on the east side of Highway 1. Built by railroad impresario Henry Harrison McCloskey as a refuge after the 1906 quake, it was purchased and restored in 1959 by interior designer Sam Mazza. It's now held in a trust and open to the public for monthly tours facilitated by the Pacifica Historical Society. Another historical stop is the **Pacifica Coastside Museum**, in the Little Brown Church, built in 1910. Inside are photos of the Ocean Shore Railroad, the building of Devil's Slide tunnel, and Pacifica's pioneering Pedro Point Surf Club.

Speaking of surf, take a stroll along **Sharp Park Beach** and its mile-long promenade. A more rigorous hike with sweeping views of

the shoreline can be found by driving south on Highway 1 to the next exit, and turning east on Sharp Park Road to **Milagra Ridge Golden Gate National Recreation Area** (GGNRA). If you get hungry, miles one and two are home to several family-owned local favorites, including **Mazzetti's Bakery**, **Colombo's Delicatessen**, and **Camelot Fish and Chips**.

MILE THREE

Golfers, train buffs, and barbecue fans have a lot to love in this neighborhood, best known for **Sharp Park Golf Course**, aka "the poor man's Pebble Beach." This 18-hole public course features a 1932 mission-style clubhouse, and there's a public archery range next door. The **California Coastal Trail** acts as a scenic buffer between the golf course and the shore, and allows hikers to access another GGNRA park: **Mori Point**. Dining options in this area are more fun than the average whistle-stop. On the east side of the highway, you'll find **Ash's Vallemar Station** inside the 1905 Ocean Shore Railroad Station. An orange boxcar nearby is home to **Gorilla Barbeque**, a takeout spot owned by Pacifica native Rich Bacchi, whose smoky brisket, ribs, and links have been featured on the Food Network's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*. The caboose next door is **P-Town Coffee and Tea**, which serves ice cream and lighter fare.

MILE FOUR

Rockaway Beach is a favorite for tourists from around the world. Set back from the highway with its own rugged cove (lit up at night for romantic surf watching), this seaport village feels frozen in time, with storied properties including **Nick's Seashore Restaurant** (built in 1927 and still family-owned), **Moonraker** restaurant, and famed button expert Pamela Wiston-Charbonneau's quirky shop **Successories in the Button Box**. Should you stay overnight, there are several lodging options, such as **Pacifica Lighthouse** and **Inn at Rockaway**. After a good night's sleep, you'll be refreshed to hike yet another GGNRA site: **Sweeney Ridge**, with its 1,200-foot summit overlooking the coast.

MILE FIVE

Pacifica State Beach (aka Linda Mar Beach) gets the most sunshine in this fog-kissed hamlet, so this is where you'll find everything from surf shops to the **Sanchez Adobe** ranch house, built in



Clockwise from far left: The staircase at Mori Point overlooks Sharp Park Golf Course, with the Pacifica Pier in distance; the 112-year-old Sam's Castle has been open to the public since 2011; Rockaway Beach is a hot spot for experienced surfers; indulge in a fresh seafood platter at Moonraker.



1846 as the country home of then-San Francisco mayor Don Francisco Sanchez. Or you could throw back a boozy shake and burrito at what many call "the greatest Taco Bell in the world," which is situated on the beach. Constructed in the '80s, this bungalow-style fast food franchise slings beer, wine, and alcohol-infused frozen drinks.

MILE SIX

Pacifica's southernmost district is nature's grand finale. As you leave Linda Mar for **Pedro Point**, Highway 1 rises to thread a narrow alley of cypress and Monterey pine. It's a surprising landscape that suddenly opens to the ocean again, and to the infamous **Devil's Slide**. Finally tamed with a tunnel replacing the rockslide-prone section in 2013, the stretch has two multiuse trailheads for accessing the California Coastal Trail. The view stretches all the way to Point Reyes, in Marin.